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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/S:STHIBEAULT AND
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, DBENZE AND AFERNANDEZ,
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SUBJECT: Damascus Media Reaction: Syria/Russia, Lebanon, Iraq,
Palestinian Territories (11/22-26)

¶1. Summary: Syrian papers reported that Deputy Foreign Minister Dr. Faisal Migdad received Russian Deputy FM Alexander Sultanov on Saturday (Nov. 25). Talks focused on developments in Palestine, Lebanon and Iraq. The two sides stressed the importance of continuous consultations between the two friendly countries as part of their efforts to help establish stability in the region. The Russian official pointed out that he is carrying a message to the Syrian leadership expressing Russia's willingness to boost bilateral relations and deepen political dialogue.

On developments in Lebanon, papers reported the assassination of Lebanese Industry Minister Pierre al-Jumayyil, featuring an official Syrian statement denouncing the crime and citing Information Minister Bilal's interview with the Spanish newspaper 'El Periodico de Catalunya,' describing those who committed the crime as "enemies of Syria and Lebanese national unity." Al-Thawrah on November 24 published pictures of four anti-Syria Lebanese leaders -- Samir Ja'ja, Walid Junblatt, Sa'd al-Hariri, and Marwan Hamadah -- under the headline: "The killers participate in the funeral." The paper says leaders of the February 14 forces in Lebanon took advantage of Al-Jumayyil's blood to advance their political agenda. It says their speeches and slogans in the funeral "were identical to the slogans of the Israeli Mossad," and it accuses Ja'ja, Junblatt, and Al-Hariri of stoking the fire of sedition and continuing their "hallucinations."

On Syrian-Iraqi relations, papers reported FM Mouallem's visit to Iraq and his meeting with Iraqi FM Hoshyar Zebari, crowned by the resumption of diplomatic relations between Syria and Iraq after 25 years.

On Palestinian developments, papers reported the visit to Damascus of Palestinian FM Mahmoud al-Zahaar and his meeting with VP Shara, who reiterated the importance of taking practical measures to lift the siege on the Palestinian people". For his part, Zahaar said in statements after the meeting that "the national Palestinian resistance movement Hamas agrees with the formation of a national unity government according to the national concordance program that has been agreed upon among all the Palestinian factions inside the legislative council and outside it."

End of summary.

12. Selected Headlines:

"Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sultanov: Russia is determined to deepen political dialogue with Syria" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 11/26)

"Arab media: Jummayyil's assassination is a US-Israeli scheme carried out by Ja'ja and Junblatt. The Lebanese government is fully responsible" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 11/26)

"An American analyst: Israel stands behind the assassination of Lebanese Industry Minister Pierre Jummayyil" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 11/26)

"Information Minister Bilal: The assassination of Pierre Jummayyil targets Lebanon's national accord. President Lahoud calls for maintaining national unity. Senior Lebanese officials condemn the crime. Syria strongly condemns the crime and reiterates concern for Lebanon's security" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 11/22)

"The February 14 team invests assassination of Jummayyil to foil the opposition move. Former Lebanese PM al-Hoss: 'Where are they driving Lebanon to?' Lebanese MP Aoun calls for unveiling the Mossad network.... Resigned Lebanese ministers: 'Al-Saniora government accumulates faults and its session today is unconstitutional" (Government-owned Tishreen, 11/25)

"President Mubarak calls for not making accusations randomly; Arab press holds Israel responsible for the Jummayyil assassination.... Egyptian 'al-Akhbar': It is a Mossad action to confuse the opposition and stir up sectarian sedition" (Government-owned Tishreen, 11/25)

"The killers of Pierre Jummayyil attend his funeral, while there is investment in the event and no investigation. Former Lebanese PM al-Hoss rejects turning the Jummayyil funeral into a political event to create sectarian sedition. Egyptian daily al-Ahram: The Mossad is behind the Jummayyil assassination. Morning Star warns against unleashing accusations. The Guardian: Syria and the opposition are the losers" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 11/24)

"French foreign Minister Philippe Douste-Blazy calls on Israel to support Lebanese government of al-Saniora" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 11/23)

"Urgent American military aid to al-Saniora government" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 11/23)

"Khalid Mishaal, Chief of Hamas Political Bureau, warns of a third Intifada and calls on Arab and Islamic countries to carry out their decision to break out from the siege against Palestinians" (Government-owned Tishreen, 11/26)

"After Olmert's visit to Washington, Israel decides to liquidate Hamas leaders" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 11/23)

"Vice-President Shara calls on the Palestinian factions to reach national accord. Palestinian FM al-Zahar: a new Palestinian technocrat government is a retreat from a previous agreement on a national unity government" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 11/22)

"Syria and Iraq resume diplomatic relations after 25 years" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 11/22)

"Major European countries support dialogue with Syria. Germany: there is no solution without Damascus. Italy: not having dialogue is not a solution. Spain: We are carrying on dialogue. UK: No to the unleashing of accusations" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 11/24)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"Accusing Questions"

Abd-al-Fattah al-Awad, Chief Editor of government-owned Al-Thawra,

wrote (11/24): "Pierre al-Jumayyil's assassination took place only hours before the UN Security Council session on the international tribunal that will try suspects in the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri....

"The assassination took place in broad daylight and just before the opposition was to take to the streets to topple Al-Saniora's government....

"Who is the killer then? The killer is the one who benefited from all this. Before Pierre al-Jumayyil was buried, part of the price of his blood was already credited to the killers' account and the account of those who predicted that assassinations would take place. We are amazed: How can they repeatedly talk about assassination orders without saying who carries out the assassinations? The answer, simply, is that they are the ones who carry them out. They have done it before. These people include a former killer-prisoner [referring to Samir Ja'ja] who is now working as an ambassador for Israeli interests in Beirut. He and his team are responsible for this heinous crime....

"Creating civil strife among Christians, applying pressure on the Free Patriotic Movement [led by Michel Aoun] to diminish its popularity, and pressuring the ministers of Amal and Hizbollah to reverse their resignation, were also among the motives behind Al-Jumayyil's assassination.

"The objectives of this assassination are clear, and the perpetrators, consequently, are known. It is a desperate attempt to return to the gains that were made after the Al-Hariri assassination. It is also an attempt to harm Syria after all the successes it has scored in the world, where the Syrian vision has proven to be correct....

"Just as they previously failed to achieve their objectives, so now they are even more frustrated. It is a dead-end for Israel's friend, as the Israeli press calls him, and for the ambassador of the Israeli interests, as he really is."

"In order for the Truth not to Be Victimized"

Isam Dari, a commentator in government-owned Tishreen, commented on (11/25): "The February 14 team in Lebanon is the primary beneficiary of the latest assassination and from all previous terrorist assassinations and bombings in Lebanon.

"The short-term objective of Al-Jumayyil's assassination is to thwart the opposition's efforts to bring down the government, while the longer-term objective is to ignite sectarian strife and undermine the opposition coalition by inciting one group against another or against the others....

"It is ironic that the February 14 team is accusing others of responsibility for the crimes that have been committed in Lebanon while the government and its agencies are unable to obtain any lead to the truth, which has become the first victim of the ruling team in Beirut, a team that draws strength from foreigners and that is managed by foreign ambassadors."

"The tragic reality is that the lives of Pierre al-Jumayyil and those who were assassinated before him were the price of an American plan and of the lust for power of a group of novices and old hands. But the truth will inevitably come out. Then, this group will fall into the trap that it tried to set for others. And then it will be too late to regret, and history will have no mercy...."

"A Crime Serving US-Zionist Plan"

Walid al-Buz, a commentator in government-owned Al-Ba'th, wrote (11/23): "The assassination of Lebanese Industry Minister Pierre al-Jumayyil, like all the recent assassinations in the country, is

part of the American-Zionist plan in the region, which is based on destabilizing the region and stirring sectarian, denominational, and ethnic instincts and chauvinism to divide and fragment the region....

"The assassination will embarrass the opposition and its effort to topple the American-backed government and form a national unity government....

"Committing a crime of this caliber in Lebanon helps the United States speed up a UN Security Council decision on the establishment of the international tribunal, where there are concerns about politicization and implementation of suspicious plans. The logic of things says that the assassination of Minister Pierre al-Jumayyil, may God have mercy on his soul, was a crime committed to help the government stay in power so that it can implement the scheme it is required to implement as part of the American-Israeli plan in Lebanon and the region...."

"Why You Are Shouting Loudly If You Are Innocent?"

Dr. Turki Sagr, an op-ed writer in government-owned Tishreen, commented (11/23): "The governing powers in Lebanon, who claim to be the majority, have recently raised their voices because they failed to hide their set role in selling Lebanon out in the cheap American-Israeli market and were unable to belittle the major victory that Hizbollah achieved for the Lebanese people....

"If these forces were really a majority, they would not fear an early election or a national unity government.... These forces want to continue excluding others and maintain a monopoly on power in furtherance of the orders they receive from foreign embassies....

"The bankrupt government forces wanted to cover their popular bankruptcy and their turning into pawns in the hands of the American ambassador in Beirut by shouting loudly, playing the tune of sectarianism and denominationalism, and inciting against Hizbollah and harming its sacrifices and its leaders in an unethical and unpatriotic manner to serve the Zionist-American plan in Lebanon and the region...."

Corbin